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ABSTRACT

A teacher and a media specialist combined their efforts to foster responsibility among students in a third grade class. Students went to the Media Center to learn research skills, but it was apparent that they lacked the responsibility to follow through with their projects. The teacher and media specialist began to implement strategies to teach resource use and group behavior skills and to promote responsibility in the classroom. Initially they targeted four students, but later expanded their focus to the entire class. Use of a classroom observation sheet provided the instructors with information about the students and made the students aware that their behavior was being monitored. A behavior modification plan called Home Court was implemented, which helped students make the connection between behavior and learning. Students designed the basic rules of Home Court and the "technicals" awarded when they did not demonstrate adequate responsibility. Student work began to reflect greater responsibility and to demonstrate greater grasp of the concepts taught. A similar approach to mathematics was implemented using a mathematics portfolio. As students began to take ownership for their tasks, they showed overall academic improvement. The project will be implemented in grades three through five in the next school year. (SLD)

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How Do We Help Our Students Become More Responsible.
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HOW DO WE HELP OUR STUDENTS BECOME MORE RESPONSIBLE

Originally we had two completely different questions from the questions you will see discussed in this paper.

Laura's question was: "Using various activities within the classroom, how can I help motivate my at risk students?"

Carol's questions was: "How do I get teachers to realize the benefits of a flexible Library Media Center schedule?"

After much discussion between the two of us, our focus began to change as we became more involved with "The Teacher's As Researchers Project."

We will take you from the beginning, to the middle, to what will be the beginning of an end.

We first began thinking about this question at the beginning of the year when we were getting exposed to various technological opportunities. We started thinking about different ways to instruct our students. We used these two components to draft a question concerning motivating at risk students. As we began doing different activities, we realized our focus needed to switch from motivation to responsibility.

We began by sending students, in small groups, to the Media Center and teaching them beginning research skills. We soon became aware of the fact that they were motivated to do research, however, they were lacking in responsibility by not being on task, not completing assignments, getting easily distracted by each other, not working cooperatively, and not truly realizing the reason for being in the Media Center.

In order to change the students' perception of the Media Center, we began to implement different strategies. We began by teaching students how to effectively use the materials housed and how to behave in small group or independent settings. Simultaneously, we initiated new approaches to classroom responsibility.

Thus our question shifted from student motivation to student responsibility. We began to make the connection between the classroom and the Media Center.

In the beginning, we also targeted four students who were representative of the different learners within the classroom. However, as we implemented our various activities and strategies, we found that we were getting a more objective view by looking at the class as a whole.

We discussed our initial observations and impressions with each other and found that we had very similar experiences within the two settings, (classroom and Media Center). We found that students were still coming into both settings not fully understanding what was expected of them. Even though we had a set structure or routine, students were not displaying the behaviors we were hoping to see. Many of the students were not returning homework or completing assignments. They continued to have a negative attitude if they were questioned about an inappropriate action, whether behavior or learning oriented. Students were easily distracted by one another and many were not respectful of each other. They had no concept of completing a task within a given time frame, their listening skills were in need of improvement, and many of them did not feel they had to participate in classroom activities.

One of the assessments we began to use was a classroom observation sheet used to record student participation and behavior during a particular class activity. The observation sheet included the following information:

a. all student names

b. a system of checking student participation

c. documenting correct or incorrect responses to specific questions

d. group setting; whole group, small group, cooperative, or independent

e. the behaviors displayed

f. a space for comments

As we began to use the classroom observation sheet, the students began to realize we were recording "evidence" and became more conscientious of their behavior. In order to get a more objective view of the students, several observers were asked to participate by recording their observations during various class activities. After an initial observation period we then explained the class observation sheet. The beginnings of class improvement began to take place.

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A weekly assessment by the students was designed to receive student responses to various questions. The students were asked the following questions:

1. What did you like?
2. What didn't you like?
3. What would you have changed?
4. How could you have improved your learning this week?
5. How could the teacher have improved her instruction?
6. Which day do you feel was your best day? Why?
7. How much did you feel you participated in daily activities?
8. How do you feel you followed class procedures?

Using these questions we obtained student responses in three different ways: self assessment, a home interview, and interviews with our district Research Coordinator. The students were given this weekly assessment to complete for several weeks. They were never told why or for what purpose.

Included in our various activities, we implemented a behavior modification plan called Home Court. The purpose of Home Court was to assist the students in making the connection between behavior and learning. The students designed the five basic rules and together with the teacher came up with the idea of receiving technicals. Technicals are given when students are not demonstrating third grade responsibility. These technicals carried over from the classroom to the Media Center. This came as a shock. As Home Court evolved, the students began to realize that we were assisting them to become responsible learners.

After implementing the above activities, it was time to hold a class meeting and explain to the students what we were doing through the weekly assessment. In the class meeting students were asked to predict class responses. We then showed them their responses question by question. Students were then asked to generate ideas on how their weekly assessments could change or become more accurate and more reflective on what was actually occurring in the classroom.

The Research Coordinator returned for a follow-up interview regarding the class meeting and its concept. The responses which she received were positive as well as conducive to the responses which were being reflected in the classroom and the Media Center.

From the class meeting, morning meetings were begun which helped students focus on their responsibilities for the day. During these meetings students were asked, "What are you going to work on today?" Their responses varied according to the area of behavior each student felt he needed to improve. At the end of the day students were asked to self evaluate. They showed "thumbs up" for good, "thumbs sideways" for OK, and "thumbs down" for needs improvement. We found that the students became more honest with each day.

Students were becoming joint participants in all approaches to their own learning and behavior with our assistance. They were beginning to see a partnership evolve.

In the Media Center, students realized they were being observed as well. They began to take part in commenting on the activity and self assessing, along with the Media Specialist. After they made their comments, she would tell them if she agreed with them or not and why. From this a conversation about what had taken place during the activity occurred. This allowed students to realize that part of their learning responsibilities included their behavior away from the classroom as well. A definite sense of being more focused on work and participation was beginning. Informing our students about what was happening in daily events and evaluations gave them a wider picture and the purpose of responsibility. Students were becoming joint participants in all approaches to their own learning and behavior with our assistance. They were beginning to see a partnership evolve.

Now we think we have the data that shows that students are becoming more responsible. The first and most recent weekly assessment show that responses have become more focused and reflective.

From the first weekly assessment, we saw one and two word responses, some students copied from a neighbor, and responses were not necessarily reflective of the week's activity but that of a particular day. On the most recent weekly assessment students were more individualized, more truthful, and more reflective of the entire week. Some students had begun to write complete sentences and explanations for their responses. Answers about what they liked and didn't like tended to be about the activity which proved them to be more successful. Listed next are examples of responses from five students who range from better than average to below average in classroom performance:

The question: What would you have changed?

1st student: 1st assessment: nothing

2nd assessment: I would have changed working in the Test Best books instead of working out on the chalkboard. I would have even did better with my behavior.

Interview: We could work in groups. I would change that.

2nd student: 1st assessment: nothing

2nd assessment: I would have changed the way that we did math.

Interview: The way we did math groups instead of independent. I like to work with others. It's easier.

3rd student: 1st assessment:

I was going to change my answer on the test.

2nd assessment: My behavior

Interview: My behavior because I can get upset about little things like playing. I get in trouble when I am playing and I should be working.

4th student: 1st assessment: Behavior.

2nd assessment: Behavior in the cafeteria (time out table).

Interview: (Not interviewed because of being LD resourced)

This evidence helps us come to the following conclusions. Overall the students are becoming focused on their behavior and how their behavior affects their learning. Consistently the students tell us that if they followed classroom rules, paid attention, and listened better, their learning could have improved. These comments show they are linking behavior and learning.

Even though our students are not necessarily where we would like them to be at this point, we have to remember "that patience is a virtue". We also realize that to be truly effective, this plan would have to be initiated from the first day of school and followed consistently each and every day. This has been a learning experience for us as well as our students. As we continue to implement within our present settings, we realize that some modifications will be necessary to meet the needs of our students as each individual becomes ready to grow and take responsibility in the learning process.

At the same time this process was being followed, the Assistant Principal began a Math Portfolio Assessment plan.

Two of her duties as an assistant principal are to coordinate and monitor the instructional program. One method used to see how well students have mastered required skills is to review report card grades each nine weeks. After collaborating with teachers to investigate why the same students consistently receive poor grades, we reached the usual conclusions: lack of parental involvement, lack of student interest in school work, failure of students to complete homework and class assignments, and the failure of teachers to vary their delivery of instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

The research question came into focus: If students are given clearly defined procedures to become responsible for their learning, would the students' grades improve in math?

A Math Portfolio is used to teach students how to be responsible for monitoring their progress in math. Each student was administered a diagnostic test including all the skills they should master in the third grade. They were told to complete only the examples they knew how to do and leave all the other examples blank if they were unsure of the answers. Using the results of the test, each student was given clear directives as to how s/he should be responsible for mastering all of the Math skills.

The following steps were used to explain the use of the Math Portfolio:

1. Each student received a Portfolio containing his/her diagnostic test and a weekly assignment form.
2. The students were instructed to locate the problems they either did not complete or did not know how to complete.
3. They were given oral directions to explain to their parents how the Portfolios would be used.

   It was the responsibility of the student to complete each assignment given on the weekly assignment form.

   They were given a list of people (parents, relatives, teachers, administrators), to ask for assistance, if

needed. It was stressed that it was the student's responsibility to seek help, if needed.

Each student knew it was his/her responsibility to return the assignment form, signed by a parent or the person who assisted with the assignment.

4. Parents responded by indicating how clearly the explanation was orally given to them concerning the use of the portfolio.

With the exception of only two students, the remainder of the class returned his/her portfolios regularly and began to take ownership for completing assigned task. The results were positive, and we began to observe the following:

1. Parental involvement improved with math assignments.
2. Students knew exactly which math skills they needed to improve.
3. Math instruction was individualized for students.
4. Seventy-five percent of the students improved their math report card grades.
5. Students were responsible for completing math assignments.

Interest in this project continues. The results affirmed the researcher's belief that if students are given clearly defined procedures, they will become responsible for their learning and show improvements in their overall academic progress. It is planned to expand the project to include grades three through five at the beginning 1995-96 school year.

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